DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 117 699 CS 202 441

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TITLE Reaction: The Cloze and the Composition Process.
PUB DATE 75
NOTE 6p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the National Council of Teachers of English (65th, San Diego, California, November 26-29, 1975)

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.83 HC-$1.67 Plus Postage
DESCRIPTORS *Cloze Procedure; *Composition (Literary); *Diagnostic Tests; Language Arts; *Language Handicaps; Language Instruction; *Language Research; Language Skills; Teaching Methods; Test Construction

ABSTRACT

This paper describes the value of the cloze procedure for teaching language and composition, classroom diagnosis of language difficulties, and research into the process of composition. Any aspect of language structure, including word order, form class words, connectives, inflectional endings, and function words, could be taught through use of the cloze. Cloze tests could be constructed as diagnostic instruments by first observing the student and then examining his or her writing. Finally, the cloze procedure is a technique which may lend itself to an investigation of the composition process. (LL)

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REACTION: THE CLOZE AND THE COMPOSITION PROCESS

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In the last two days we have heard many valuable ideas about examining, measuring and investigating both the composition product and process. However, there is one gap I would like to fill in by discussing the potential of a procedure which has not traditionally been linked with composition. I am referring here to the Cloze Procedure, which most of you are probably familiar with as a technique for measuring reading comprehension and readability, as is illustrated below.

A Cloze test is constructed mechanically. The first and last _____ are left in tact. _____ nth word is deleted _____ replaced with a blank. ___ _____ task is to fill _____ the blanks. Cloze tests have traditionally been used to measure various aspects of readability and reading comprehension.

Therefore, a Cloze test involves mechanically replacing every nth word--(usually every fifth for fiction and every tenth for nonfiction) with a blank. Students who are able to fill in only 44% or fewer blanks out of five fifty-word paragraphs are probably reading the material at frustration level. Thus, the Cloze procedure is an efficient technique for simultaneously measuring the reading comprehension and readability level of any written material for any given group of students.

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However, today I would like to discuss the Cloze procedure in terms of its potential for composition, and by this I mean:

1) its potential for teaching language and composition,

2) its potential for classroom diagnosis of language difficulties and

3) its potential for research into the process of composition.

Such adaptation of the Cloze into the composition domain, however, would imply a flexible deletion system rather than the mechanical every-nth-word deletion system described above.

1) Teaching Language and Composition.

Any aspect of language structure including word order, form class words, connectives, inflectional endings and function words, could be taught through use of the Cloze. For example, supposing a teacher decided it would be easier to teach composition if his students knew the terms "verb" and "noun". A Cloze test could be constructed deleting all of a given set of form class words. As the students completed the exercise, they could be stimulated to discover the cues in the surface structure of language for recognizing the given set of form class words. Such discovery learning might be a lesson in the scientific method and inductive reasoning as well as in language structure.

Or supposing a teacher decided that his students needed practice in using more vivid and interesting action verbs or more specific image-evoking nouns. All the action verbs or concrete nouns in a passage could be deleted and the student given sufficient practice improving his skill with such word choices.

With flexible applications of the Cloze procedure one could zero in on any language element of concern. And this includes imaginative language elements;

for example, one could delete metaphors and similes from a passage or poem and let students dream up their own.

A flexible use of the Cloze procedure could provide a format for teaching such higher thinking skills as induction. For instance, a passage developed initially around facts could be presented with a long blank at the end for students to fill in a generalization reached by considering the stated facts. The reverse process of deduction could be taught as well by beginning a paragraph with a generalization and asking students to fill in several blanks with details or facts derived from the generalization.

Some advantages for utilizing the Cloze procedure in teaching quickly emerge:

a) It allows for the integration of language arts instruction since reading, writing and language are all rolled into one when this method is used.

b) Passages upon which to base a Cloze exercise could be taken from student writing, a practice which would probably increase student involvement. This might provide a novel and less painful approach to revision as it allows instruction to focus on one language element at a time.

c) Because Cloze tests are easily constructed, it would be fairly simple to develop a sequential series of Cloze exercises for individualized language instruction.

d) The technique could be used for any grade or ability level.

e) It allows an instructor to provide any varying degree of structure demanded by a student for any given writing situation.

2) Classroom Diagnosis of Language Difficulties.

A teacher can examine the kinds of errors made by a student on different kinds of Cloze tests. Errors should be checked for logical, syntatic and semantic consistency. If the student has made bad guesses--then it's important to find out why.

Perhaps he lacks a command of such transitional elements as conjunction usage and pronoun reference so vital to both rhetoric and between-sentence comprehension. Perhaps he lacks sufficient awareness of the relationships between within-sentence elements which are signalled by word order, function words, and inflectional endings. Or the problem might be semantic rather than syntactic suggesting that a student would best profit from vocabulary enrichment or assistance in tapping the passive vocabulary he does possess.

A teacher would be limited only by his own ingenuity in the task of constructing diagnostic Cloze tests. Careful observation of the student and examination of his writing should precede the construction of a Cloze diagnostic instrument. Sources of difficulty should then be systematically eliminated one at a time. For example, Cloze tests can be constructed on a hierarchy of passages which decrease in semantic and syntactic difficulty. Furthermore, the reading component can always be eliminated by transforming a Cloze exercise into a listening test.

3) Researching the Composition Process.

It seems from an intuitive basis at least, that the Cloze procedure is a technique which would better lend itself to an investigation of the composition process than of the product. Therefore, the most fruitful preliminary research might be that which utilizes an intensive, in-depth small-n approach. The creative researcher could then capitalize on the potential of the Cloze for gleaning insights from the introspection of the subject. Hopefully such efforts

might lead to a number of significant research hypotheses which could then be tested on a larger scale.

In conclusion, it is clear that the full potential of the Cloze procedure as a tool for diagnosing, teaching and investigating composition has not even begun to be tapped. I invite you to experiment, to go beyond my thoughts and determine if this technique can answer any of your needs.